

critical digest

Vol. II No. 22

March 20, 1950

The Weekly That Keeps You Informed of the Current Broadway Critical Scene

N.Y. Opening This Week

Great To Be Alive-Winter Garden, 3/23/50. Vinton Freedley presents new musical with book by Walter Bullock and Sylvia Regen, music by Abraham Ellstein. Cast features Vivienne Segal, Stuart Erwin, Valerie Bettis, Mark Dawson, Martha Wright and Bambi Lynn. Mary Hunter directs.

Shows That Closed

Touch and Go-Broadway, 10/13/49-3/18/50. Slightly more than half of the 30 critics rated recommended the musical by Jean and Walter Kerr and Jay Gorney. Most welcomed Nancy Andrews to stardom, but many doubted if the material lived up to the enthusiasm of the cast. Included in the "con" votes were critics of Herald Tribune, Mirror, Sun, Compass, Variety, Billboard and New Republic.

Tobacco Road-46th Street Theatre, 3/6/50-3/11/50. In spite of its long run history Jack Kirkland's production of the Negro Drama Group's version of the Erskine Caldwell classic was not long for Broadway. The weekly reviewers were of the same opinion as their daily colleagues. Gabriel, Cue, was grateful that the show was produced again. In 1933 he had made the error of admitting he laughed at the proceedings. He now sees he was very wrong, there was nothing to laugh at. Critics of Time, Variety, Billboard also panned revival.

Daily Reviewers Look At the New Play

The Consul-Barrymore, 3/15/50. Lyric drama, musical drama, grand opera, musical theatre or what do you call it. The critics, with the sole exception of Watts, Post, raved about the Gian-Carlo Menotti musical, even though they couldn't agree on exactly what it was. Patricia Neway walked off with the singing honors, with Marie Powers close behind. Downs, Music critic of Times, considers the show as a masterpiece for presenting a new wedding of the English language with music. Atkinson did not cover the first night performance. Barnes, Herald Tribune, shared his review space with Herald Tribune's music critic, Thomas. Latter thinks show will take a place in the century's stage history, if not in its musical history. Watts, Post, found the production difficult and prolix and by no means always completely effective dramatically. But he did praise the singing and the production which he considered chilling and impressive. Coleman, Mirror, recommended the show to all who think life behind the Iron Curtain is dandy.

Magazines View the Shows

Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep-Broadhurst, 3/2/50. George Jean Nathan would have loved the Elaine Ryan dramatization of the Bemelmans novel if it had been a musical. But as it stands he thinks she has captured little of the whimsical essence of the original. Nathan pans the acting of the Marches as being a bad combination of melodrama and old time vaudeville.

As You Like It-Cort, 1/26/50. Fearing that Katharine Hepburn has mistaken the Forest of Arden for the Bryn Mawr campus, John Mason Brown, Saturday Review of Literature, joins the handful of critics who think the Shakespeare comedy is one to be read, not to be acted. Though he admits this is about the best and handsomest production of the Bard's classic ever seen, he isn't convinced that it is worth the trouble. But he did admire Hepburn's legs.

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' The Green Room Department '
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AWARD SEASON NEARS...Pulitzer and Drama Circle awards come in April and May, but several publications seem to be rushing the season. Cue picks the "Stars" of the season as Pearl Bailey, Julie Harris, Carol Channing, Lilli Palmer, Shirley Booth, Sidney Blackmer, Arthur Margetson and Dennis King. Marie Torre, drama editor of World Telegram and Sun, polled six top producers as to their choices for the "Stars of Tomorrow". They picked Janet Blair, Brandon de Wilde, John Forsythe, Arthur Kennedy, Betta St. John and Maureen Stapleton. Walker, News, rumors there will be no Pulitzer prize award given for an American play. Pollock, Compass, notes the entire business of awards as one for which only true schizophrenics need apply. But he does think the advantages of awards outweigh the disadvantages.

MARSHA HUNT CLUB...The young actress in The Devil's Disciple has captured the hearts of three critics. Vernon Rice, drama editor of Post, recounted his continuing feud with Post critic Richard Watts, Jr. Bach has been vying to praise her the most. Rice's notes of an interview with her at Sardi's ended up with material for a love poem, not a newspaper story. Pollock, Compass, also was considerably impressed by the lady.

IDEA OF THE WEEK...Chapman, News, recommends a special Sunday matinee of Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep played with no scenery and the merest handful of props. Done sans Indians, Chapman thinks the Bemelmans play starring the Marches would be truly wonderful nonsense.

INTERVIEW ROUNDUP...Tallulah Bankhead's on a wine diet, Morehouse, World Telegram and Sun, reports. Stopping in N.Y. on her criss-cross country tour in Private Lives she revealed that she is looking for a new play. Lee Grant, who left Detective Story to play in All You Need Is One Good Break, gets fascinated with roles that scare her, Hawkins, World Telegram and Sun, discovered. She doesn't want to rush to Hollywood, because she considers it a "place of no return". Noting the "This Week" interview with starlet Geraldine Brooks, Pollock, Compass, thinks it might be a good idea if actresses depended more on histrionic talents and less on make-up.

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' The Lighter Side '
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TWO LINE REVIEWS...Dickstein, Eagle, penned this two line poem about The Devil's Disciple: "Maurice Evans and Bernard Shaw Kid King George's men o' war."

FALLING CRITICS...George Jean Nathan's "Theatre Book of the Year" is in much demand at the N.Y. Public Library, reports Walter Winchell, Mirror. The only trouble is the librarian claims the book falls off the shelf and hits actors on the head.

CRITICAL NEWSBREAKS...New Yorker "Newsbreak" department picked this gem from Hawkins, World Telegram and Sun, review of Come Back, Little Sheba. "It is a rarely honest piece of theatre writing."

CHARACTERS GALORE...The theatre's in great shape, decides Watts, News, after making a survey of just one floor of a theatre building in the Times Square area. He found five tenants in seven offices who call themselves producers. Some produce some connive. Also present were a group of busy press agents, a successful playwright who keeps a staff busy five days a week and a lady play broker.

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' News & Notes '
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Frederic March penned the line "The New Yorker can have it -- the Daily Worker" in this week's ads for Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep...Broadway may see a West Coast preacher present revivals in a Main Stem theatre, predicts Kilgallen, Journal.

OBITS

SID SILVERMAN...Publisher of Variety and Daily Variety dies at his home in Harrison, N.Y. March 10th after a lingering illness at the age of 51. His son, Syd, age 18, inherits the two trade papers. Sid started his career at the age of 7. His reviews of vaudeville shows were printed as written, misspellings and all. His credo of reviewing was, "Be hard -- but never hard to the point of destroying the people you are reviewing," says Variety's Abel Green.

BROCK PEMBERTON...Producer of Harvey, age 64, succumbed to a heart attack March 11 at his N.Y. apartment, one week after making a stunt appearance in his famed show at Phoenix, Arizona. Before entering producing, Pemberton served his theatre apprenticeship as a drama critic. Starting with the famous Emporia Gazette, he worked on the N.Y. Evening Mail, N.Y. World and N.Y. Times. Two days before his heart attack, Pemberton told the "Kansas City Times" that the current theatre attendance recession can be laid to the feet of the critics. They kill a play before it gets going, before the public gets a chance to determine its true value, he complained.

Off Broadway

WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS...Abbe Practical Workshop production of Robert S. Scott and John L. Gerstad's play about a lying-in hospital finds the trade critics in controversy. Variety reporter rates show as worthy of Broadway production, praising actors, directors and authors. Francis, Billboard, writes it off as "emotional clap-trap", because it only scratches the surface of its subject. He also suspects the cast includes some "guest" actors not listed. Hawkins, World Telegram and Sun, considers this 'off Broadway' production the most polished and mature the group has turned out. Though he doubts if it is strong enough for commercial production, he does think it was worth the hearing.

Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Photostats of reviews may be obtained at 25 cents each to subscribers, 50 cents each to others.

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| 1. NY Times | 11. Newark News | 21. Catholic World |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 12. Women's Wear Daily | 22. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 13. Daily Worker | 23. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 14. Wall Street Journal | 24. Chr. Sci. Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass (Star, PM) | 15. Journal of Commerce | 25. Sat. Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post | 16. George Jean Nathan | 26. Newsweek |
| 7. NY Sun (Morehouse) | 17. Morning Telegraph | 27. Time |
| 8. NY Journal American | 18. Variety | 28. Nation |
| 9. NY World Telegram and Sun | 19. Billboard | 29. New Republic |
| 10. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Theatre Arts | 30. New Yorker |

All You Need Is One Good Break-Mansfield, 2/9/50-2/11/50. Reopened 2/20/50.

Pro: 17. Con: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-16-18-19-23-27-30.

Arms and the Girl-46th Street Theatre, 2/2/50. Pro: 3-4-5-10-11-12-14-15-17-19-23-24-30. Con: 1-2-6-7-8-16-18-29. So-So: 2-9-26-27.

Pro

As You Like It-Cort, 1/26/50. 3-4-6-7-9-10-11-12-16-17-18-19-22-26-29. Con: 1-2-23-24-25-28-30. So-So: 5-8-14-28.

Caesar and Cleopatra-National, 12/21/49. Pro: 26 votes. Con: 5-8-13. So-So: 9.

Clutterbuck-Biltmore, 12/3/49. Pro: 3-5-6-7-8-12-15-17-19-20-21-23-27-30.
Con: 1-9-11-13-16-18-22-24-28-29. So-So: 2-4-10-14.

The Cocktail Party-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 2-3-4-5-6-7-8-10-11-12-15-17-18-19-23-24-26-27-28. Con: 1-9-14-22-25-29. So-So: 16-30.

Come Back, Little Sheba-Booth, 2/15/50. Pro: 1-5-8-9-1-11-14-16-17-18-19-22-23-26-29. Con: 2-4-7-12-27. So-So: 3-6-30.

The Consul-Barrymore, 3/15/50. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-8-9-10-12-14-15-17. So-So: 6.

Death of a Salesman, Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. So-So: 27.

Detective Story-Hudson, 3/23/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-12-14-15-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-26-27-30.

The Devil 's Disciple-Royale, 2/21/50. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-8-9-10-11-12-18-19-22-23-26-29. Con: 30. So-So: 16.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Ziegfeld, 12/8/49. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 6-21-28.
So-So: 16-22-27.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 5-6-7-26-27-30.
None: 13-20-21.

I Know My Love-Shubert, 11/1/49. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 5-16-22-27-28-29. None: 13

The Innocents-Playhouse, 2/1/50. Pro: 23 votes. Con: 2-4-28-29-30. None: 20-21.

Kiss Me, Kate-Century, 12/31/48. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. None: 28.

Lost In the Stars-Music Box, 10/30/49. Pro: 1-2-3-5-6-7-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-23-26. Con: 8-9-13-20-21-22-24-25-28-29-30. So-So: 4-27.

The Man-Fulton, 1-19-50. Pro: 2-4-8-10-11-14-15-23-26. Con: 1-3-5-6-9-12-13-16-19-22-27-30. So-So: 7-17-18.

The Member of the Wedding-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 25 votes. So-So: 2-27-30. None: 21

Miss Liberty-Imperial, 7/15/49. Pro: 4-7-8-12-17-19. Con: 1-2-18-20-22-23-25-27-29. So-So: 3-6-9-21-26.

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 24 votes. Con: 21-24. So-So: 13-16-17-
None: 28.

Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep-Broadhurst, 3/2/50. Pro: 2-10-12-15-19-30. Con: 1-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-14-16-17-18-23-27. So-So: 26.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 4-6-7-8-9-12-15-17-18-19-20-21-24-25-26-1-2-3-30. Con: 27. So-So: 23.

Texas La'1 Darlin'-Hallinger, 11/25/49. Pro: 3-6-9-12-13-14-15-16-17-21-22-24. Con: 1-4-7-8-18-19-23-29-30. So-So: 2-5-10-11-20-26-27.

The Velvet Glove-Golden, 12/26/49. Pro: 15 votes. Con: 2-5-16-18-22-23-27-30.
So-So: 1-6-29. None: 25-28.

Where's Ch relly?-St. James, 10/11/48. Pro: 16 votes. Con: 6-7-12-13-16-19-22-24-25-26. So-So: 4-27. None: 10-28.

